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Canada goose thrives while Earth's species dwindle

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Some eight years after world leaders pledged to reverse an alarming decline in biodiversity by 2010, the losses keep mounting across the globe, according to a new United Nations report.

Pummeled by climate change, deforestation, pollution, overfishing and a host of other threats, the number of plant and animal species continues to plummet, says the [Global Biodiversity Outlook report](#), the third issued since the 2002 agreement.

Having pegged 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says the world has failed in its efforts and that conditions are actually getting worse.

"Having reviewed all available evidence, including national reports . . . this third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook concludes that the target has not been met," he said in a statement.

"Moreover, the Outlook warns, the principal pressures leading to biodiversity loss are not just constant but are, in some cases, intensifying."

Frogs and other amphibians are most imperiled by the continuing habitat disruptions, but they are hardly alone, the report says.

"The abundance of vertebrate species, based on assessed populations, fell by nearly a third on average between 1970 and 2006, and continues to fall globally," it says.

"Species which have been assessed for extinction risk are on average moving closer to extinction."

While many thousands of species continue to decline, however, a number have made invasive forays into new territories where their numbers are skyrocketing.

This includes our own iconic Canada goose, which tops the list of environmentally disruptive species listed by European researchers for that continent.

According to the DAISIE project (Delivering Alien Invasive Species In Europe), which submitted the report, the white-cheeked geese are causing problems in their new home that are all too familiar here.

"The Canada goose frequents parks and beaches in such large numbers, that its feces can pollute water to such a degree that it may become a health hazard," the DAISIE report says.

"It is a pest species causing habitat modification such as trampling and algal blooms from eutrophication caused by nutrients from roosting



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AARON LYNETT/TORONTO STAR

geese. It is also a minor feeder on crops.”

The report praises Canada for opening up huge new protected areas across the country.

But it also points out the devastation caused to British Columbia forests by the pine beetles over the past decade.

“An unprecedented outbreak of the mountain pine beetle has devastated more than 110,000 square kilometres of forest in Canada and the western United States since the late 1990s,” it says.

Among the biggest problems is that species are being lost even before scientists can properly study them, the Associated Press reports.

“That’s the tragedy of biodiversity loss,” said Delfin Ganapin, a senior manager for the UN Environment Program’s Global Environment Facility that provides financing for the treaty’s goals. “Before you’ve read the book in a library, you’ve already lost the books.”

Competition for jobs and economic growth, rather than lack of planning, is seen as the biggest hindrance, particularly in the least developed nations of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where many of the world’s most impoverished people live.

Africa, for example, is home to a quarter of the world’s mammal species and a fifth of all bird species. Forty-nine of the African Union’s 53 nations have strategies for saving imperiled species.

But none of the 110 nations that submitted reports to the treaty claimed to have met their individual targets for improving biodiversity.

Still, many of these problems “could be solved with urgent action,” Ganapin told a news conference at UN headquarters.

“If we can only summon even a fraction of the money that was put in to solve the financial crisis, we would have been able to avoid very much more serious and fundamental breakdowns in the Earth’s life-support ecosystems,” he said.

The report does contain a few slivers of hope: It says, for example, that measures to control the spread of so-called alien invasive species have resulted in the rescue of at least 31 bird species during the past century.